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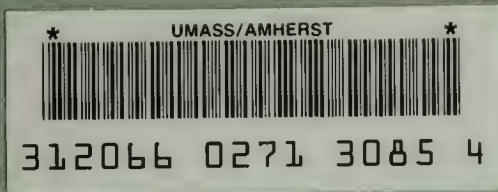
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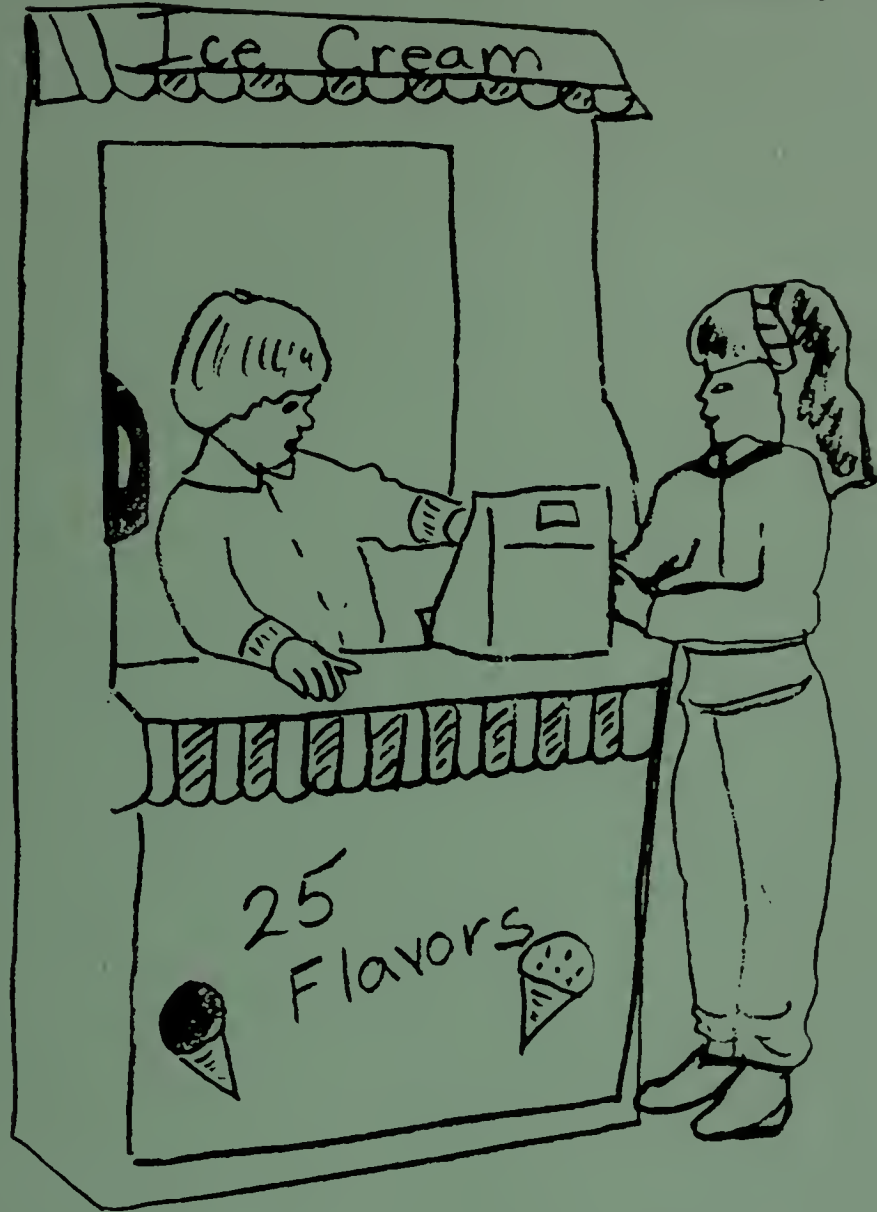
PLAY



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For several years I have observed children in my classes become deeply involved in dramatic play. Their play has occurred in many areas of the classroom, at times when they were allowed the freedom to initiate their own activities. I have observed many kinds of play themes, both real and fantasy, but the element common to all the themes is their importance to the children. Some themes are played out over and over again. The children's interest in this activity has led me to focus more attention on it and to encourage and help children to develop themes more fully. I have even joined in the play on some occasions, modeling roles and encouraging shy children to join in, though this has happened infrequently.

In developing themes which have ranged from a space-age restaurant to a lemonade stand, I have become increasingly aware of the potential for integrating science, social studies, math and language arts with the play themes. This integration is an important focus of "Dramatic Play".

I am grateful to three people for their help with this project: to my husband Henry for helping me learn the ways of the computer; to Sue Rasala, who offered to edit my first draft and made many valuable suggestions; and to Chris Kamp, with whom I have developed many dramatic play themes.

DRAMATIC PLAY

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INTRODUCTION

Dramatic play occurs when a child assumes a role, pretending to be someone else and drawing from first or second hand experience. Real-life or fantasy situations are acted out. Verbalizations are imitative speech. When at least two children are involved it is called sociodramatic play.

The area most often set up for dramatic play in classrooms for young children is the house corner. This is because the home setting represents the social situation that is most familiar to young children. However, the house corner can and should become many other settings as the children get older and their interests and needs change.

Dramatic play can occur in many areas of the classroom besides the dramatic play corner. This is discussed in Part IV.

The value and importance of dramatic play should not be underestimated. Important functions of a classroom dramatic play area include:

- * social interaction - cooperative play, taking turns, sharing
- * experimenting with adult roles, thus gaining greater understanding of these roles
- * acting out emotional needs
- * using imagination for fantasy play

Many kinds of learning occur as children play. A close look at what happens as they act out dramatic play themes reveals that social, intellectual and emotional learning are taking place.

Social development occurs as children play cooperatively, share and take turns. Children also act out their perceptions of how people behave toward each other by assuming roles and interacting with other children in common play themes. When they pretend to be "mommy," "baby," "daddy" and so forth, they are

reenacting what they have seen and how they perceive social relationships to be. They are able to "try out" a variety of roles.

Intellectual development occurs through dramatic play as children integrate information and experiences from their lives into their play themes. Two important ideas from Piaget's studies of how children learn are especially relevant to dramatic play. First, young children learn by being physically involved. As a child pretends to be a doctor or nurse again and again, he or she gains a greater understanding of that particular role. Section IV discusses ways the teacher can encourage and increase such learning. Second, children progress from the use of real objects to the use of increasingly abstract symbols to represent ideas and concepts. Dramatic play gives children many opportunities to develop this natural progression. For example, a block or even an imaginary telephone may be used as a symbol of a telephone if none is available and the situation calls for one. In this case, the child is using symbolic representation and developing an understanding of how symbols can represent things.

Emotional development occurs during dramatic play as children work through emotionally charged experiences. These experiences may be very happy ones or very frightening ones. Happy experiences such as a family vacation or a birthday party are probably played out because they were so enjoyable that it is fun to repeat them. This is similar to remembering experiences by looking at slides, movies or photographs. Children also act out scary situations such as getting a shot, seeing an accident, riding in an ambulance or being reprimanded by a parent or teacher. In the dramatic play situation the children are in control and thus can work toward conquering their fears by acting out the frightening scenarios. This is probably analogous to adults talking through their traumatic experiences again and again.

Observations of children's play from ages three to six indicate that fantasy play is at a peak.

Creativity is developed through fantasy play, as children try out different roles and create and control various situations.¹

¹

House Corner, A Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood, Creative Associates, Inc., Gryphon House, 1979.

II. DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF PLAY

Children progress through stages of dramatic play skills just as they progress through stages in other areas of learning. Through her observations and research Sara Smilansky has defined several areas of sociodramatic play in which children move through different levels of ability. These areas of dramatic play are role play, using props, make believe, time, interaction and verbal communication.

Role play- At the beginning level, the child acts out mommy, daddy, baby, trying to understand his/her role in relation to those people who are closest to him or her. The child imitates only one or two aspects of the role, such as rocking the baby and feeding it a bottle. At a more advanced stage, the child acts out a greater variety of roles, such as a policeman, doctor, post office worker or banker, and attempts to understand the world around him/her. The concept of a role is also expanded. For example, pretending to be mommy, the child might feed and rock the baby, put it to bed, wash dishes, talk on the phone and rush out to a meeting.

Using props- Initially, the child uses a real object, such as a telephone, and physically plays with the object. This may involve dialing some numbers and banging the receiver. Later, the child may use any object for a prop, such as a block for a phone, or a pretend prop. Props are used as parts of play episodes. For example, the phone may be used to order a pizza for supper.

Make believe- At the beginning level, the child imitates simple actions she/he has seen adults do. For example, the child holds the telephone receiver to her/his ear. At a more advanced level, the child's actions are part of a play episode. For example, a memo pad is used to take telephone messages and to make a grocery list.

Time- In an early stage of development, the child may stay only a minute or so in the dramatic play area,

trying on a hat, putting on a dress or picking up and looking at some objects. At a later stage of development the child may stay in a dramatic play area for a half an hour and become really involved in a play episode that carries out a theme.

Interaction- Interaction begins with solitary play, as the child acts out a role alone with no apparent awareness of other children who may be in the dramatic play area. At a later stage the child interacts with others as the need arises to share props or interact with another person. Finally, the child plays cooperatively with others, acting out a role that is part of a well-developed play theme.

Verbal communication- At first, verbalization centers around the use of toys. For example, "I had the telephone first!" Later on there is dialogue about the play theme. For example, in a restaurant:

Waiter - "What do you want to eat?"

Customer - "Do you have hamburgers?"

Waiter - "Yes - and french fries!"

Customer - "I'll have a hamburger and french fries."

Waiter - "You have to pay me."

Customer - "How much?"

Waiter - "\$55!"

Customer - "OK, here you are."²

Many factors influence the level of dramatic play:

1. Real-life experiences - Children have varying experiences and varying abilities to internalize information from the experiences, as well as varying degrees of parental interaction and explanation of these experiences.

2. Parental involvement - Some parents play with their children more frequently than others and allow their children to work alongside them at such tasks as cooking, washing the car or doing the laundry.

3. Parental/cultural attitudes - Some parents encourage fantasy play, while others discourage it.

4. Television - When children watch television a great deal, television shows may replace fantasy play,

as the children live vicariously in the world of television and don't create play situations themselves.

5. Toys - Toys that perform a number of actions themselves, such as a robot that walks and talks or a doll that talks, cries and drinks, inhibit children from developing creative and imaginative actions and themes of their own.³

To summarize the developmental stage of dramatic play for five year olds: it helps them to assimilate, comprehend and master experiences while also helping them to sublimate aggressive or frightened feelings. Roles include real-life roles such as pilots, teachers and nurses and cultural folk heroes such as super heroes, kings and queens. Sociodramatic play often has realistic elements as children imitate adults, but it may also include acting out of deeper fantasies. Such fantasies are even more often revealed through puppet shows and story dictations. Five year olds begin to create and use abstract symbols or adjuncts for their dramatizations, such as tickets for a show, money for a supermarket or menus for a restaurant. Five year olds begin to gain mastery and control of stressful experiences through their dramatic play.

²

Based on the research of Sara Smilansky,
University of Tel Aviv

³

House Corner, A Creative Curriculum for Early
Childhood

III. SETTING UP A DRAMATIC PLAY AREA

A. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

Some important considerations for setting up a dramatic play area are:

1. Set up the area so that it is separate, clearly defined and at least partly enclosed. This helps to make play more purposeful and avoids running from one area to another.
2. Locate the dramatic play area next to the block area, as both centers are noisy and involve dramatic play. The proximity of the areas will encourage interaction between the children in the two areas.
3. Make sure that the area reflects the cultures of the children in the class whenever possible.
4. Make sure to provide props for both boys and girls.
5. Establish exactly where things belong in order to encourage neatness and make clean up easier.
6. Label the area (eg. Housecorner, Charlie's Restaurant, City Hospital, etc.). This helps to define the area for adult visitors who are in the classroom and exposes the children to meaningful print.
7. Display pictures of what the dramatic play area represents and/or photographs of the children in the area. For example, pictures of a hospital setting will provide information about hospitals and give the children ideas about play themes.
8. Limit the number of accessories available at one time. This helps to focus the children's play and makes clean up easier.
9. Make sure accessories are in good condition.

10. Have paper and pencils and/or print that is appropriate to the dramatic play theme available. For example, put a memo pad and pencil by the telephone in a house setting, include books and newspapers in a hospital waiting room, provide menus and order pads in a restaurant.

11. Determine a way to limit the number of children who are in the dramatic play area at one time and a way to make sure that all the children have turns there.

12. Encourage productive play by establishing roles that will be acted out in the dramatic play area.

B. RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT AND ACCESSORIES

A dramatic play area does not need to be elaborate in order to be successful. A few carefully chosen, carefully placed pieces of furniture and appropriate accessories will lead to meaningful play. Basic furniture for a house area should include a sink/stove unit, a small table and chairs, accessories and a storage area. Other pieces of furniture and equipment are desirable but not absolutely necessary. Refer to the lists below for recommended furniture, equipment and accessories.

The children can build sturdy furniture themselves with large hollow blocks, and very much enjoy building their own furniture as needs arise. Large appliance boxes can be used to create a variety of dramatic play areas, such as stores, banks, post offices and space ships. Dramatic play panels or puppet stages can also be used for such themes.

Furniture and accessories will vary according to themes, but the same pieces of furniture can be used for different themes if they are turned around, labeled or just imagined to be different by the users!

Recommended basic furniture and equipment
for a dramatic play area:

sink/stove unit or...

any combination of or all of the following: sink,
stove, refrigerator, cupboard

small table and chairs

baby bed

large unbreakable mirror

dramatic play panels or puppet theatre

large hollow blocks

. Recommended basic accessories:

two telephones

dishes and eating utensils

pots, pans and cooking utensils

dress-up clothes and hats

cash register

dolls and clothes

keys

pocketbooks, briefcases, lunch boxes

printed materials (books, newspapers, magazines, signs,
labels, etc.)

paper and writing tools

IV. EXPANDING DRAMATIC PLAY THEMES AND INTEGRATING THEM WITH THE CURRICULUM

A. DRAMATIC PLAY THEMES

Some dramatic play themes will evolve naturally through the children's play, and will require no intervention from a teacher. These themes will evolve from the children's own interests and experiences. For example, a child who has witnessed an accident may initiate play centered around the occurrence of an accident. The teacher might want to extend the play by adding props or making suggestions, but this is often not necessary or desirable in such situations. However, if the whole class has shared an experience, it is often appropriate for the teacher to initiate and plan with the children a new play theme. For example, after a field trip to a supermarket, a class supermarket might be set up. By replaying the experience, the children will reinforce the learning that took place on the trip. The classroom supermarket also provides the teacher with opportunities to extend the children's learning in appropriate ways. For example, in a supermarket children might:

- * sort foods according to food groups
- * label shelves for food groups
- * shelve foods appropriately
- * price foods/make price tags
- * pay for foods and make change
- * write stories about and draw pictures of their supermarket

Children should be involved as much as possible in setting up a new dramatic play area. They can brainstorm and make lists of everything that the new area should have. They can make some things for the area and help to collect others. They can make signs and labels. In addition, the children can help the teacher identify roles that are to be assumed. This will limit the number of children in the area and increase purposeful play. For example, a restaurant might have:

- cook
- waiter or waitress
- customers
- cashier

A hospital might have: patient
 doctor
 nurse
 lab technician
 visitor

New dramatic play themes do not always have to relate to a field trip, but may relate to a class study in some way. For example, a space ship could be part of a study of the solar system; a bank or store could be part of a unit about money. A theme might be developed simply from an expressed interest of a group of children (eg. pet shop, ice cream shop, gas station).

Props can be stored in cardboard boxes that are organized and labeled by themes. Activities that occur in the dramatic play area should sometimes be recorded through photographs, children's drawings and writings and teachers' writings. Sharing and displaying of such written and visual recording will help the children to share experiences and to get new ideas. It will encourage other children to join in the play themes.

Following are some ideas for dramatic play themes:

Supermarket

- * shelves, boxes, kitchen furniture or crates for food display
- * supermarket bags
- * shopping carts made from cardboard cartons and pulled with string or plastic carts borrowed from children
- * labels for different sections of the store (Meat, Dairy, Produce)
- * empty food containers (not glass)
- * stickers on food items to indicate prices
- * cash register
- * play money

Restaurant

- * kitchen furniture
- * table(s) and chairs for customers
- * dishes, silverware, tablecloths
- * a few empty food containers
- * menus
- * order pad and pencil
- * aprons for waiters and waitresses
- * telephone
- * cash register
- * play money

Bakery

- * baker's hat and jacket
- * apron for counter attendant
- * play dough cookies, doughnuts, cupcakes (can be baked for permanence)
- * cupcake papers
- * mixing bowls, spoons
- * baking pans, cupcake tins
- * oven (cardboard box or kitchen furniture)
- * paper bags
- * shelves or boxes for display of baked goods
- * table for counter
- * cash register and play money

Bank

- * window for teller (play panels, puppet stage)
- * withdrawal forms, deposit slips and pencils
- * play money

Shoe Store

- * chairs for customers
- * shoes and shoe boxes
- * ruler to measure foot sizes
- * foot stool
- * cash register
- * play money

Hospital

- * surgical masks (?)
- * plastic medicine bottles
- * eye droppers
- * "doctors" and nurses' coats
- * band-aids
- * ace bandages
- * crutches
- * stethoscope
- * dolls for patients (and doll beds)
- * x-rays
- * doctor's bag

More themes to expand

Optometrist shop
Clock shop
Post Office
Corner store
Laundromat
Space ship
Police or Fire Station
Library
McDonald's
Ice cream shop
Lemonade stand
Gas station

B. INTEGRATING PLAY THEMES WITH THE CURRICULUM: SOME EXAMPLES

In Section A suggestions are made for expanding children's learning through dramatic play themes. Following are two examples of how to integrate play themes with content from specific curriculum areas.

Restaurant (integrating dramatic play with language arts, social studies, math and science)

1. Brainstorm about what a restaurant has in it, the people who work there and what jobs they perform.
2. Make a list of what is needed for the classroom restaurant.

3. Collect furniture and other accessories for the restaurant.
4. Set up restaurant with collected items.
5. Children make items still needed (eg. menus, restaurant sign, money).
6. Establish roles for children who are playing in the restaurant: customers, waiter/waitress, chef, cashier.
7. Introduce exchanging of money and making change if children are ready for these concepts.
8. Children might make real food for the restaurant and combine learning about nutrition with the dramatic play theme.
9. Children learn vocabulary words associated with restaurants, such as waiter, waitress, cashier, hostess, host, chef.

Variations: Lemonade stand
 Ice cream shop

Hospital (integrating dramatic play with social studies
 and language arts)

1. Go on a field trip to a hospital.
2. Recall different departments in the hospital and different jobs the people performed.
3. Determine what departments the classroom hospital will have and what will be needed to set it up.
4. Collect furniture and other accessories to construct the hospital.
5. Make signs and labels for the hospital.
6. Determine roles: doctor, nurse, patient, laundry worker, baker, etc.

7. Read books about hospitals.
8. Children write and illustrate stories about the class trip to the hospital, their personal experiences and the classroom hospital.
9. Children learn vocabulary words associated with the hospital.

C. ACTIVITY CENTERS AND MATERIALS THAT FOSTER DRAMATIC PLAY

Dramatic play occurs naturally in many areas of the classroom besides the specified dramatic play area. Following are some classroom activity centers that foster dramatic play. Different themes can be encouraged by providing a variety of accessories. Some themes are suggested for each of the activity centers that follow.

1. Unit blocks
zoo, farm, town or city, garages, highways, stores, houses
2. Hollow blocks
homes, the Mayflower and other ships, swan boat, space ship, hospital, post office, police station, fire station, garage
3. Sand table
lakes, rivers, tunnels, volcanoes, roads and racetracks, mountains, farms, zoos, prehistoric times
4. Water table
washing dishes and babies, measuring and pouring for cooking, swimming pool, lake, ocean or river, scientist doing experiments
5. Play dough/plasticine
retelling of familiar stories and nursery rhymes; zoo, circus and farm animals; dinosaurs; making food for house play

6. Puppet stage or dramatic play panels
puppet shows, supermarket, bakery, post office,
voting booth, bank
7. Lego
buildings, space ships, cars, trucks, machines,
robots
8. Flannel board
retelling of familiar stories, folk tales and
nursery rhymes
9. Tri-wall or large cardboard box
store, post office, house, bank, puppet stage,
cave, operating room

V. FROM DRAMATIC PLAY TO CREATIVE DRAMATICS

Children's dramatic play experiences lead naturally to and enhance creative dramatics activities. Creative dramatics activities range from acting out very simple finger plays or rhymes to elaborate productions of plays or musicals. Both dramatic play and creative dramatics encourage children to work together cooperatively, and to express themselves verbally and creatively. If children have frequent opportunities for dramatic play, the progression from dramatic play activities to creative dramatics will occur readily.

For young children the process of creative dramatics is more important than the product. All of the children should have opportunities to act out different roles or parts. Dialogue should not be memorized line for line; children should create dialogue from very familiar text. After many experiences, they will be able to create their own stories and accompanying dialogues.

Appropriate materials for creative dramatics activities include:

- * finger plays
- * poems, rhymes, jingles
- * nursery rhymes
- * folk tales and familiar stories, including those used for shared reading experiences
- * songs
- * operettas or musicals created from familiar stories or folk tales

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by Campus Film Distributors Corp., 1971.
24 Depot Square
Tuckahoe, N.Y. 10707
914-961-1900

CATALOGUES

Childcraft Education Corporation
20 Kilmer Rd.
P.O. Box 3081
Edison, New Jersey 08818-3081

Community Playthings
Route 213
Rifton, N.Y. 12471

Constructive Playthings
1227 E. 119th Street
Grandview, Missouri 64030

Kaplan
1310 Lewisville-Clemmons Rd.
Lewisville, North Carolina 27023

